SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI
EDITED BY J. SCHAEFER

WHAT WILL HELL BE LIKE?

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by

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

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What Will Hell Be Like?

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THOUGH MANY of the pagans were true atheists, considering hell a fable invented to frighten the wicked, the more renowned of the ancient philosophers, such as Socrates, Xenophon, Aristotle, Plato, and others, had no difficulty in admitting the existence of a future life — a heaven where the good would be rewarded, and a hell where the evil are to be punished. Only the most perverted of men will deny that there is a God, the Creator and Governor of all things. Such men would prefer to deny the existence of God, than to face the just chastisement of their own misdeeds.

We Expect Reward or Punishment

On the one hand, men know perfectly well that God is a just rewarder of good, and at the same time they behold in the world countless wicked men who live in the midst of prosperity,

while many of the virtuous live out their lives in the midst of affliction and misfortune. Hence, most people are convinced that after this mortal life, there exists another world in which vice is to be chastised and virtue rewarded as it deserves.

Teaching of Pagan Philosophers

The most famous of the pagan philosophers did not hesitate to teach that there exists in the other life a heaven and a hell. Xenophon and Socrates, for instance, remarked that, "rewards are in store for those who please God, and punishments for those who displease Him." The same sentiments are expressed by Plato, Plutarch and others. While I refrain from quoting passages from these philosophers, I cannot pass over in silence two beautiful passages of the great orator, Cicero. In the first, he exclaims: "I wish to have no part with those who have recently begun to teach that souls die along with bodies, and that all is destroyed by death. Of far more weight with me is the authority of the ancient philosophers and of our own ancestors. They paid religious homage to the dead, and considered that their entrance into heaven should be

made easy for every good and just man." The second passage is even more to the point: "Those souls, which have been soiled by the vices of this life, will take the false road which separates them from the company of the gods; on the other hand, those who have preserved themselves pure and chaste, will find easy admittance to the divinity, the source of their existence."

Belief of Pagans

Among the fables of pagan peoples, there are numerous tales, which, though they are fictitious, nevertheless attest to the belief of these people in the existence of a place of punishment in the future life. For us Christians, however, this belief of ancient pagans, and their philosophers, is but a substantiating argument. For we have the word of God Himself, attesting to the existence of hell in countless passages of Sacred Scripture.

Where Is Hell Located?

The question as to the place where hell is situated has been a matter of conjecture among the Fathers of the Church and theologians. Saint John

Chrysostom, for instance, was of the opinion that it is situated outside the bounds of this universe. More commonly and with more reason, other theologians think that hell is situated within the earth itself. Some have even gone so far as to declare that it is near the surface of the globe, basing their opinion, rather quaintly, upon the existence of many volcanic mountains, such as Vesuvius, the Volcanic Isles, Mt. Etna, and others.

Catholic Teaching

Aside from these debatable opinions, a group of heretics, known as the Ubiquitists, maintained that hell is not restricted to any determined place, but is to be found everywhere, since God has not destined any special place for the damned. This opinion, however, is evidently false, and contrary to the common belief of the Catholic Church which teaches us that God has established a definite place for the demons and the reprobate, as is evident from several texts of Sacred Scripture. Saint Jerome deduces this specifically from a passage in the book of Numbers (Num. 16/31-33). Here is described the fate of Dathan and Abiron who were precipitated into

hell, falling into a chasm which opened under their very feet. At the same time a great flame burst from the earth and killed two hundred and fifty men who were accomplices in their sin. Moreover, in many passages of Sacred Scripture, the word, 'descend,' is used in refence to hell, indicating that hell is situated in the bowels of the earth.

Hell Is a Definite Place

This assertion is confirmed by a passage of St. Luke (16/22): "But the rich man also died and was buried in hell." The sacred text employs the word 'buried,' because burials are made within the earth. Moreover, the rich man himself describes hell as a "place of torment" (Lk. 16/28), confirming the opinion that hell is a determined and definite place. In another place it is called a 'lake'; "Thou hast saved me from those descending into the lake," (Ps. 29/3); and elsewhere, a pool: "And the devil who deceived them was cast into the pool of fire and brimstone." (Apoc. 20/9). It is evident, therefore, that hell is a determined place, and most probably situated within the earth. But, as to where, precisely, it is situated, whether at the very center of the earth,

or nearer to the surface, cannot be determined from any revealed document. St. Thomas also declared that the dimensions of hell, which will be the dwelling place of the damned after the resurrection, cannot be determined.

Pains of Hell

Let us now treat of the pains of hell, and, first of all, of that of sense. St. Thomas proves that the fire of hell is a corporeal and material fire, though, for the most part, he does not write of the fire which torments the souls separated from their bodies, but of that which the damned are to endure after their corporeal resurrection. Many heretics have maintained that the fire of hell is not material, but only metaphorical or imaginary fire. There are numerous texts in Sacred Scripture, however, which demonstrate that the fire of hell is a true, material and corporeal fire. We read, for instance, in the book of Deuteronomy: "A fire is kindled in my wrath, and shall burn even to the lowest hell." (Deut. 32/22) And in the book of Job: "A fire that is not kindled shall devour him" (Job 20/26), revealing that this fire of hell needs not to be nourished, but, once enkindled by God,

burns eternally. There are a number of passages in the book of Isaias referring to this fire of hell: "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (33/14); "Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be a loathsome sight to all flesh." (66/24) "He will give fire, and worms into their flesh, that they may burn, and may feel forever." (Judith 16/21).

Fire of Hell

In the parable of the gospel, the rich man buried in hell cries out to Lazarus, "I am tormented in this flame." (Lk. 16/24) He says, "in this flame," to show that the fire of hell is a fire of a particular type, a fire prepared expressly to avenge the injuries which sin has done to God by carnal pleasures. For, as the book of Ecclesiasticus remarks, "the vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms." (Eccl. 7/19) Hence, St. Thomas argues that this fire will be the instrument of the avenging justice of Almighty God.

Can a Spiritual Soul Feel Fire?

But here a difficulty is posed: how is it possible for corporeal fire to torment the spiritual soul? In answer to this question, we can only say that we know that it can be done. Perhaps the answer lies in this explanation of many theologians. The material fire of hell will be given an extraordinary power by God, whereby it will be able to bind the spiritual soul to its place of torment, thus causing the soul untold humiliation and pain.

Punishment by Cold

In this same fire, St. Thomas remarks, the bodies of the damned, in addition to the intense heat, will endure bitter cold, passing from one to the other, without knowing a moment of relief. Thus do Scripture scholars explain the passage of the book of Job: "Let him pass from the snow water to excessive heat, and his sin even to hell." (Job. 24/19) Hence, St. Jerome says, the damned in hell endure all their torments in this one fire.

Remorse of Conscience

In addition to their sufferings from the heat and cold of the fire of hell, Sacred Scripture enumerates a number of other torments which will afflict the damned. One of these is the 'worm,' to which the Scriptures refer frequently. Some commentators have explained this 'worm' as a material thing, which will feed upon, without consuming, the flesh of the damned. But most theologians explain it metaphorically as the remorse of conscience which will afflict the damned in the fire and darkness of hell. Forever will they have imprinted on their memories the results of their sins; forever will they repeat the words ascribed to them in the book of Wisdom: "We have erred from the way of truth, we wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction and have walked through hard ways. What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? . . . Such things as these the sinners said in hell." (Wis. 5/6-14)

Suffering from Devils and Darkness

Added to their own remorse of conscience, the damned will also be tor-

mented by the reproaches of the demons. This will be one of the most cruel punishments of the damned: the devils, who are their enemies, will continually mock them and remind them of their sins. Nor will the sufferings of the bodies of the damned cease here. They will also be afflicted by the terrible darkness of hell, described by the holy man, Job: "Before I go, and return no more, to a land that is dark and covered with the mist of death: a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth." (Job. 10/22)

Pain of Loss of God

A certain author has written, but with little foundation, that the *pain of loss* is the same for all the reprobate. But it seems far more probable to me and to the majority of theologians that, though the damned are equally deprived of God, this pain will, nevertheless, afflict each according to the measure of his faults and the knowledge he will have in hell of the God Whom he has lost. For it is difficult to believe that one who has lost God by one mortal sin will be tormented in the same degree as one who has lost Him by a hundred sins. It is

equally inconceivable to me, for instance, how one who has been in the state of sin for but one day, can be called upon to bear the same degree of punishment as he who has remained in this state for a whole year. For just as he who has loved God more ardently during his life, will enjoy Him more in heaven, because of the knowledge of the immense good which he will then possess, so also will the damned, who has deprived himself of his God, be more severely tormented in realizing more deeply the great good which he has lost.

Teaching of St. Thomas

St. Thomas describes for us perfectly in what will consist the happiness of the elect and the torment of the reprobate. In so far as his intellect is concerned, the Saint remarks, man will find complete joy in the vision of God; but, in so far as his affections are concerned, he will find complete satisfaction in the permanent union of his will with the infinite goodness of God. On the other hand, the torment of the damned will consist in being deprived of all divine light in his intellect, and in finding his affections obstinately turned away from the divine goodness. Elsewhere the

saintly Doctor teaches that, though the punishment of the fire will be more terrifying, this separation from God is, however, a greater torment than that of the fire.

God Makes Heaven

In short, it is God Who will be our paradise, for He embraces all goods in Himself, as He Himself once declared to Moses: "I will show thee all good" (Exodus 33/19). Such was also the promise which He made to Abraham because of his merits: "Fear not, Abram, I am thy protector, and thy reward exceeding great" (Genesis 15/1). And what greater reward can He promise than Himself, Who is the one good embracing all other goods?

God Makes Hell

It is also God who will make hell, for, as Saint Bernard remarks, He Himself will be the chastisement of the damned. For, just as the elect will be supremely happy because God is for him, and he is for God, so also will the reprobate be unhappy, because God is no longer for him, and he is no longer for God. Let us listen to the threat

which God made against those who refused to belong to him during this life: "Call his name, 'Not my people'; for you are not my people, and I will not be yours" (Osee 1/9). It is in this, then, that the torment of the damned will consist; it consists in the first sentence which Jesus Christ will pronounce over His enemies: "Depart from me into everlasting fire." This eternal separation will constitute hell for the damned.

Eternal Choice Is Made During Life

For the present, sinners, blinded by the apparent goods of this earth, choose to live far from God and to turn their backs upon Him. And should God, who cannot dwell with sin, wish to enter into their hearts by expelling sin from them, they are not ashamed to repel Him, exclaiming: "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21/14). Depart from us, we do not wish to follow your ways, but our own, our passions, our pleasures. The great multitude of those, says Sacred Scripture, "who sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always." (Daniel 12/2). Yes, these unfortunates now sleep in the dust

of their blindness; but, in the other life, unfortunately for them, they will awaken and realize the immense good which they have lost in voluntarily losing God.

Greatest Pain of Hell

The sword which shall pierce them with the greatest sorrow, will be the thought of having lost God, and of having lost Him through their own fault. Unfortunates that they are! They now seek to lose sight of God, but once fallen into hell, they will no longer be able to cease thinking of Him, and in this will their chastisement consist.

Saint Augustine says, that, in hell, the damned will be forced to think of nothing but God, and that will cause them terrible torment. And Saint Bonaventure, expressing the same sentiments, says that no thought will torment the damned more than the thought of God. The Lord will grant to them such a vivid knowledge of their offended God, His goodness so unworthily spurned, and consequently, of the chastisement which their crimes have merited, that this knowledge will cause them a suffering greater than that of all the other punishments of hell.

We read in the book of Ezechiel: "Over the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of the firmament, as the appearance of crystal terrible to behold, and stretched out over their heads above" (1/22). Explaining these words, one author says that the damned will have continually before their eyes a terrible crystal or mirror: with the assistance of some fatal light, they will behold, on one hand, the immense good which they have lost in voluntarily losing divine grace, and, on the other, they will view the justly wrathful face of God; and this torment will surpass by a million times all the other punishments of hell.

On this same subject, the author Cajetan makes the following reflexion upon the words of David: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9/18). The prophet, says this author, does not here speak of a change of heart, or conversion, but of the spirit of sinners. For just as sinners do not wish to think of God during this life, that they might not be forced to renounce their passions, they will be forced, despite themselves and by a just chastisement, to think continuously of God in hell. They would wish to shut

out all remembrance of God from their minds, but they will be forced to think always of Him, thus recalling all the benefits which they have received from Him, as well as the offenses which they have committed against Him and by which they have been separated from Him for all eternity.

The Damned Do Not Forget

Let us now consider briefly the condition of the intellect of the damned in hell. Saint Thomas says that the damned will be able to remember all the subjects of natural knowledge which they acquired here on earth, for this acquired knowledge will remain in their souls after death. This is evident from Sacred Scripture as well, from the response of Abraham to the rich man buried in hell: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime" (Luke 16/25). This, then, is the conclusion of the Angelic Doctor: just as in the elect there will be nothing that is not a subject of happiness to them, so also in the damned there will be nothing which will not be a subject of torment to them. Hence, the damned will preserve in their memories the things which they knew here on earth,

not, it is true, for their consolation, but solely to increase their torment. Moreover, during this life, the soul is frequently prevented from considering thoughts which would be disagreeable to it, because of corporeal sufferings and anxieties; but in hell the soul will no longer be subject to this influence of the body. Hence, in hell the soul will no longer be prevented from considering those things which can be a cause of torture to it. Likewise, in hell, the soul of a man will have constantly in its memory all the divine appeals made to it during life as well as the number of sins which he committed, each of which will procure for him a new hell.

The Damned Know Nothing About Us

Moreover, says Estius, just as God will procure the satisfaction of the blessed, by making them know what concerns us, and especially that which concerns them in a special manner, such as our prayers addressed to them, on the other hand the damned will remain ignorant of all that concerns us, because they are complete strangers to the Church.

Do the Damned Have Faith?

It might be asked whether those Christians who possessed faith in this life, and who have not lost it by apostasy or heresy, will preserve it in hell. Saint Thomas responds in the negative, for in order to believe with a supernatural and theological faith, one must hold with a pious affection of the will to God the revealer. This pious affection, however, is a gift of God, of which he deprives them as well as the demons. They do, however, believe by a sort of natural faith, to which they are forced by the evidence of external signs, though this faith is not supernatural. It is in this sense that Saint James has written that "the devils also believe and tremble" (James 2/19), signifying that their faith is forced and fearful.

Will the damned ever see or behold the glory of the Blessed? Saint Thomas answers that at the last judgment the reprobate will see the blessed in their glory, without being able to distinguish in what it consists, solely realizing that they are enjoying an inexplicable glory. This sight will afflict them with great sorrow, either because of a feeling of envy, or because of regret at having

lost that which they themselves could have acquired. And for their eternal chastisement, this shadow of the beatific vision which they have beheld will remain imprinted in their memory forever.

The Will Is Set on Evil

Let us now discuss the condition of the will of the damned. St. Thomas remarks that the will of the damned, in so far as it is a natural faculty, cannot but be good, since it does not proceed from themselves but from God, Who is the author of nature; the damned have, however, vitiated it by their malice. But, when we consider the will of the damned in its use, it cannot but be evil, for it is completely opposed to the will of God and obstinate in evil.

But whence does this obstinacy in evil proceed? Sylvius, in a very clear explanation, says that the obstinacy of the damned results from the nature itself of their state. For, since the damned now find themselves at the terminus of their existence, and deprived of all divine assistance, God, by a just judgment, abandons them to the evil which they have voluntarily chosen and in

which they have wished to end their life. It is natural for everything, once it has reached its terminus, to rest in it, unless it be moved by some external power. Now, the damned have terminated their lives with the depraved will in which they have died, and God has resolved to leave them to the evil which they have chosen. Just as the blessed can never possess an evil will, because they are always united to God, in like manner the damned can never turn their will to good, and consequently will always be unhappy, because they are obstinately and irrevocably opposed to the divine will.

Do the Damned Wish Evil to Others?

Because of this evil will of the damned, the question might be asked: 'Do the damned wish that all men be damned?' Saint Thomas responds in the affirmative, because of the hatred which the reprobate bear to all men. But here a difficulty presents itself. As the number of the damned increases, the punishment of each individual is aggravated: how, then, can they desire an increase of torment for themselves? Saint Thomas says that such is their hatred and envy that they would prefer to suf-

fer more cruelly with many others than to suffer less alone. And it matters little to them that among those whose loss they desire are some whom they loved dearly during life. For the Holy Doctor remarks that all affection which is not based upon love of God vanishes easily; otherwise, the order of justice and right would be reversed in hell.

Case of the Rich Man In Hell

If such be the case, then how can we explain the solicitude of the poor rich man in hell, who besought Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers on earth, to warn them to do penance lest they also be buried in hell? Saint Thomas explains that the envy of the damned is such that they would prefer to see all men lost, even their own parents; but since this is impossible, and, rooted as they are in self-love, they would rather see their parents delivered from hell in preference to strangers, for they would be still more tormented by envy should they behold their own loved ones damned and others saved. This, then, is the reason for the concern of the rich man over the salvation of his brothers. The Angelic Doctor adds that this reprobate desired to see his brothers escape

hell, lest his own punishment be aggravated by their damnation, for by his bad example he had given occasion for their damnation.

Do the Damned Repent of Sin?

It might also be asked, whether the damned repent of their sins. Saint Thomas answers that a man can repent of his faults in two ways: directly or indirectly. He can repent directly in so far as he repents by a sentiment of hatred for the sin committed; in this sense, the damned cannot repent of his sin, for since he finds himself confirmed in his perverse will, he loves the malice of his fault. But he can repent indirectly, in so far as he detests his punishment, of which his sin is the cause. Thus the damned will their sin, in so far as its malice is concerned, but detest its punishment, which, nevertheless, can never cease because their sin endures forever.

Hatred of God

Do the damned hate God? Saint Thomas says that God, considered in Himself, is the supreme good, and, therefore, cannot be an object of hatred

for any reasonable creature. But He can become such to the damned in two ways: first, as the Author of their punishments, by which He is bound to afflict them; second, because they are obstinate in evil, while He is the infinite good, they would hate God with their whole heart, even though He punished them but little.

Do the Damned Desire to Be Destroyed?

We ask, finally, whether the damned would prefer to be annihilated and deprived of existence, than to submit to the punishments which they endure. Saint Thomas, considering the question in itself, answers in the negative, for, as he says a state of non-being is never desirable, for it implies a deprivation of all good. But, if this annihilation be considered as an end of all punishment, Saint Thomas says that, from this point of view, the state of non-existence presents itself as a good. It is in this sense that Jesus Christ spoke this sentence of Judas: "It were better for him, if that man had not been born." (Mt. 26/24). Saint John seems to say the same thing, when speaking of the damned in the Apocalypse: "In those days men shall seek death and shall not find it: and

they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them." (Apoc. 9/6). This will of the damned, however, is uncertain, for they wish to continue to exist, that they might always hate God.

Punishment of Hell Is Eternal

These punishments of the reprobate, which we have been considering, will endure forever. This doctrine of the eternity of the punishments of hell was first denied by Origen, and later by the Socinians and a large number of Protestants. Origen, however, was condemned by the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, and, in general, by all the Fathers of the Church.

This Punishment Is Not Unjust

Nor can the eternity of the punishments of the damned ever be qualified as unjust. For anyone who offends God by a mortal sin merits an infinite punishment for an offense which is infinite. Hence, however severe or long the punishment may be, it can never be proportionate to the offense which has been committed. For the majesty of God is infinite; hence, whoever sins mortally merits an infinite punishment. It, there-

fore, appears just that mortal sin be punished by an eternal punishment.

How Punishment Is Measured

It is useless to object that it does not seem just to inflict an eternal punishment for a sin which endures but a moment. For Saint Augustine remarks that punishment is not measured by the duration of a fault, but by its gravity. Even at the tribunals of justice here on earth the penalty of death is imposed upon some crimes which are committed in an instant.

The Angelic Doctor adds that it is but just that the punishment should not cease as long as the fault does not cease. Now, a fault which remains eternally can be remitted only by the grace of God, which man cannot acquire after death. As we have seen above, the will of the damned is obstinate in evil. Hence, he continues to love his sin at the same time that he submits to its punishment. How, then, can God deliver him from his chastisement, while he continues to love his fault? How can God pardon his sin, while the damned is hardened in his hatred for God, if at the same time the Lord offered him par-

don and friendship, the damned refused both the one and the other?

Nor can it be objected, as some heretics do, that it is contrary to the goodness and mercy of God to behold one of his creatures suffer eternally from such terrible punishments in hell. For, as Saint Thomas remarks, God has given superabundant witness of his goodness and mercy toward men. Beholding all men lost by the sin of Adam and their own sins, what great goodness did he not manifest in descending from heaven to earth to become man, in the endurance of a poor, humble and afflicted life, in pouring forth the very last drop of His blood amid such terrible torments upon an infamous gibbet? What greater proof of His goodness could He have given to men than to leave to them His own Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, that they might there find nourishment for their souls, and that, through this means, they might preserve and increase their spiritual forces until death, after which, finding themselves more closely united to God, they might enter into heaven, there to enjoy eternally the life of the blessed?

Ah! Most certainly, on the day of judgment, the Lord will make known to the entire world how many mercies, how many lights, how much help He has dispensed to each man during his life! And the numerous ingrates, who, despite such favors, have merited such chastisements, with what patience did He not pursue them, with what love has He not begged them to repent? If, despite such favors, they still would not renounce their passions and earthly pleasures, wished to live and die separated from God, voluntarily abandoning themselves to their eternal ruin, how can it be said that God has not manifested His mercy and goodness towards them?

In lieu of declaring the punishments of hell not to be eternal, some heretics have invented another opinion, maintaining that the punishments of hell will be lessened after a time, or momentarily interrupted. But this opinion is expressly contrary to the Sacred Scriptures. Isaias, for instance, speaking of the reprobate proclaims: "Their worm will not die, and their fire will not be extinguished." (Is. 66/24). And in the sentence pronounced against them at

the last judgment, Jesus Christ will say to them: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

Jesus' Parable of Dives and Lazarus

"There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen; and feasted sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him; moreover the dogs came, and licked his sores.

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died: and he was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom: And he cried, and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted; and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is

fixed a great chaos: so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot, nor from thence come hither.

"And he said: Then, father, I beseech thee, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments. And Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. But he said: No, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance. And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead." (*Luke* 16:19-31).

Fatima Children's Vision of Hell

(NOTE: In 1917 Our Blessed Mother appeared six times at Fatima, Portugal to Lucia dos Santos and Jacinta and Francisco Marto, three small children. During the course of these six world-famous apparitions—now approved by the Church as worthy of our devotion and propagation—the Blessed Virgin Mary made several startling statements and predictions, among them the outbreak of World War II if people did not change their lives. During the July 13 apparition, she allowed the

children to see a vision of Hell. Following is Lucia's description of what they saw.)

At this point, Lucia was heard to say aloud: "Yes, she wants people to recite the Rosary. People must recite the Rosary." The Lady's face then grew very grave and she said: "Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice: 'O my Jesus, this is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the offences committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.'" At these words, she opened her hands on the three children once again and the light streaming from them seemed to penetrate the earth, and the children beheld a vision of Hell. Lucia cried out in terror, calling upon Our Lady. "We could see a vast sea of fire," she revealed many years later. "Plunged in the flames were demons and lost souls, as if they were red-hot coals, transparent and black or bronze-colored, in human form, which floated about in the conflagration, borne by the flames which issued from them, with clouds of smoke, falling on all sides as sparks fall in a great conflagration without weight or equilibrium, amid shrieks and groans of sorrow and despair that horrified us and caused us to tremble with fear. The devils could be distinguished by horrible and

loathesome forms of animals, frightful and unknown, but transparent like black coals that have turned red-hot." Full of fear, the children raised their eyes beseechingly to the Lady, who said to them with unspeakable sadness and tenderness: "You have seen Hell where the souls of poor sinners go. In order to save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If people do what I ask, many souls will be saved and there will be peace."

Lucia later stated that although the vision lasted "but an instant," she felt they would have died of fear and terror if Our Lady had not already promised to take them to Heaven.

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